

Introduction

While the COVID-19 pandemic has upended our lives and created unheard of challenges for everyone in this global village, administrators, faculty, staff, and students in Catholic higher education have confronted these difficulties with creativity, perseverance, and dedication, transforming high-quality educational experiences at an unequaled pace. At ACCU and the *Journal of Catholic Higher Education*, we are grateful for the support and attention of our member institutions, particularly our authors and reviewers who agreed to assist us with this issue despite increased work and stress brought on by the pandemic.

Fortuitously, the first article in this issue was submitted just as the pandemic took hold and campuses quickly adjusted to remote learning, more often than not under circumstances in which “online education” had not been a primary modality. Gabriel Martinez, who directs online education at Ave Maria University, explores how faculty teaching in remote settings might learn from St. John Henry Newman’s Oxbridge tutorial system. The author notes that residency was key for Newman but argues that despite the lack of a residential component, remote learning can be enhanced through the use of well-moderated discussion boards, adaptive learning technologies, rapid grading, and collaborative work that mimics Newman’s style. When primacy is given to engagement and interaction between faculty and students, the educational experience becomes much less “professorial” and much more “tutorial.”

We frequently publish articles focused on teaching and learning in the context of the religious charisms of college and university founders. In the second article, Jeffrey Sable offers the results of his preliminary research on the effect that the Lasallian mission can have on students at a Christian Brothers university. The author explores the benefits of mission statements, including ways that these statements suggest appropriate learning activities and provide common purpose that inspires and motivates both instructors and students. Sable emphasizes the mission statement in course syllabi and at the beginning of each class period, drawing students’ attention to the mission of the institution. Using these and other practices focused on the mission throughout the semester, the author’s pilot study found that students had a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the Lasallian mission, making it more salient to them.

The next article focuses on the governance structure of Catholic institutions of higher education, noting the rapid changes in ownership and governance among most of these institutions beginning in the 1960s. While some Catholic colleges and universities remain closely tied to their founding religious community, more often than not the influence of these religious groups has waned over the years, and boards may exercise greater independence from their founders. Michael Rizzi explores the history of Great Britain's decentralization of power over its former colonies and gleans certain lessons for Catholic institutions in the twenty-first century moving forward in lessening dependence on their religious founders. He suggests actively engaging with the Church through more creative frameworks for cooperation, better use of symbols connected with the religious order and Catholicism, and celebrating the positive ways that Catholic institutions contribute to the local and larger mission of the Church.

Kaitlin Gabriele-Black undertook a pilot study of LGBTQ+ students at Salve Regina University and their perceptions and experiences at a Catholic and Mercy institution. Noting that LGBTQ+ students at Catholic and secular institutions can experience barriers, hostility, and even harassment, the author explores the experiences of these students at the university and examines the activist work among the students, the risks they face, and reasons for participating (or not) in these activities. Employing a "minority stress model" as well as developmental theory on emerging adults, the author finds that students at Catholic institutions have less difficulty coming to terms with their sexuality than students at some other faith-based institutions, but Catholic institutions also can be locations of discrimination and prejudice. Gabriele-Black's study found that Catholicism can have both positive and negative effects on LGBTQ+ students. For some students, being on a Catholic campus increased their anxiety because of negative experiences, while others found that Catholicism and Mercy values promoted greater kindness and understanding toward them. At the same time, some students in the study saw no connection between the Catholic and Mercy character of the university and their overall experience. Acknowledging the preliminary findings of the pilot study, the author notes some ways that Catholic institutions can move forward in aligning Catholic values and religious charisms to better serve LGBTQ+ students.

Finally, many Catholic colleges and universities serve not only traditional residential students, but also a large number of adults either beginning or returning to academic studies. Among these students are

new mothers who can face many barriers in pursuing their dreams for higher education. At the University of Detroit Mercy, several faculty and staff noted that one impediment for new mothers was the lack of appropriate and designated spaces for breastfeeding their infants. The authors of our final article, inspired by the ethos of the Sisters of Mercy and Catholic Social Teaching, recognized the need and first looked to other institutions for information or ideas. Finding that few Catholic institutions have created spaces for breastfeeding mothers, they developed an innovative approach to create a lactation support space for students, staff, faculty, and guests. Here, they review the challenges faced and suggest a process for other Catholic institutions.

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